

PRELIMINARY AMENDMENT

Attorney Docket No. Q67080

spacer above the firing end of the center electrode, the metal plate tip being a spark-erosion resistant metal which includes Pt, Ir, Rh, Pd, Re, Os, Ru, Ni or alloy thereof.

6. (Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein,
a clearance between the spacer and the firing end is maintained during the step of
bending the metal strip so as to protect the firing end of the center electrode.

7. (Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein,
the firing end of the center electrode is made of a tip having a diameter in the range of
from 0.3 to 1 mm.

9. (Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the spacer has a rounded
portion toward which the metal strip is bent by a punch, in said preliminary bending step.

10. (Amended) A method according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
storing information relating to the position of the firing end of the center electrode in a
computer memory; and
using said information for positioning the spacer.

11. (Amended) A method according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
storing information relating to the position of the firing end of the center electrode in a
computer memory; and
using said information for precisely forming a gap-distance between the metal strip and
the firing end of the center electrode.

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12. (Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the position for the spacer is determined by positional information of the firing end of the center electrode, the positional information being determined with reference to a position of a part constituting the spark plug.

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13. (Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein positional information of the firing end of the center electrode is measured by use of a position-detecting sensor using a laser.

14. (Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the force applied to the metal strip for precisely forming the gap distance is caused by a die moving in parallel with a center electrode axis.

15. (Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the arc portion to be formed in the metal strip by positioning the spacer is located at substantially the same level as the firing end of the center electrode.

16. (Amended) An apparatus adapted to perform the method according to claim 1.

19. (Amended) An apparatus according to claim 17, further comprising a visual-image processor for detecting information on said gap-distance.

20. (Amended) An apparatus according to claim 18, further comprising a memory for storing said measured positional information and/or said detected gap-distance information.

21. (Amended) An apparatus according to claim 18, further comprising a CPU for controlling said means for positioning said spacer, said means for preliminarily bending said

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metal strip and said means for precisely forming said gap-distance, based on said measured
and/or stored information.

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